

# South Puget Sound Forum: PROGRAM SUMMARY

OLYMPIA CENTER, OLYMPIA WA, APRIL 29, 2006

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## PURPOSE AND THEME

The forum was organized by members of the Puget Sound Council and co-sponsored by the Puget Sound Action Team, Thurston Regional Planning Council, LOTT Alliance, Taylor Shellfish Company, and Thurston County Chamber. The purpose of the forum was to engage community leaders of South Puget Sound in a public discussion to:

- ❖ learn about the condition and future of South Puget Sound's waters and watersheds;
- ❖ rediscover connections between the health of these resources and the area's economic vitality; and
- ❖ explore new approaches and partnerships to better protect these resources and better align the areas environmental and economic interests.

## SPEAKER SESSION

Karen Fraser, *Puget Sound Council, Washington State Senate*

Senator Fraser put South Sound in a global, regional and local context to help people understand the setting and key issues facing the South Sound community. She explained the work of the Puget Sound Council and the purpose of the forum to look at the status of South Sound and to engage with each other to develop a common understanding of our shared future. The tendency is to take Puget Sound for granted, but in fact it defines the character of the area and is fundamental to our quality of life and prosperous economy. Another tendency is to segment the waterways instead of looking at the system comprehensively. It's a momentous time, and we want our actions to result in a positive future for South Sound.

Brad Ack, *Director, Puget Sound Action Team*

Brad described the challenges facing Puget Sound and explained how they have not changed significantly in recent decades. Although new threats and issues have emerged (e.g., climate change, pharmaceuticals and personal care products in wastewater), he illustrated this point by superimposing the problems and charge to protect Puget Sound in the mid-1980s with today's problems and the charge of the new Puget Sound Partnership. He explained how the overall effort needs to employ a variety of approaches to address the problems, needs to engage the residents of the basin like never before to raise awareness and change behaviors, and needs to ramp up on all fronts to effectively match the scale of the problems.

Jay Manning, *Director, Washington Department of Ecology*

After canoeing on the waters earlier in the morning, Jay stepped in to share his personal experiences growing up in the Port Orchard area and now living on Budd Inlet. His experiences have shaped his view that the best part of Puget Sound is "the place where you live," and there's great hope and opportunity protecting the waters and bringing back the orca and other prized wildlife of Puget Sound. Jay used the example of the Walla Walla River, which ran dry during the summer months for over 100 years due to excessive withdrawals, to illustrate the potential of cooperative conservation as the essential means for collaborative problem solving. When taken as a whole, the problems of Puget Sound are enormous, but he pointed out that when the issues are

simplified and broken down to a watershed, community and personal scale they are more manageable and solvable, and give us real hope for success.

Bill Dewey, *Puget Sound Council, Taylor Shellfish Company*

Bill gave an overview of South Puget Sound's health based on findings in the indicators report produced by staff from Thurston Regional Planning Council and Puget Sound Action Team. The presentation gave information on the status and trends of several measures associated with population growth, land cover change, shoreline modification, shellfish water quality, freshwater quality, and marine water quality. The presentation and indicators report are both available online with other material from the forum.

## PANEL SESSION

~ moderated by Doug Mah, *Olympia City Council, Puget Sound Council*

Michael Cade, *Economic Development Council of Thurston County*

Eric Erler, *Capitol Land Trust*

Patti Case, *Green Diamond Resource Company*

Betsy Peabody, *Puget Sound Restoration Fund*

David Troutt, *Nisqually River Council*

Mark Kitabayashi, *Thurston County Realtors Association*

The speakers explained the work of their respective businesses and organizations. Key points that emerged included the Sound's value as an economic resource; the need for education, incentives, and regulatory predictability; the need for more creative and collaborative partnerships to connect people with the resources and to solve problems; and the value of watershed- or place-based management and public engagement. Issues of concern included the pending property rights initiative and the inevitability and impacts of population growth.

- ❖ Michael Cade emphasized South Sound's value as an economic engine that directly and indirectly supports virtually all economic activity in the region, and protection of these natural assets is a priority for the community.
- ❖ Patti Case explained how Green Diamond Resource Company, with over 900,000 acres of working forest land along the West Coast, has set aside approximately 15 percent of this area as part of a long-term habitat conservation plan to protect water quality and aquatic habitats.
- ❖ Eric Erler described how the Capitol Land Trust builds partnerships across all segments of the community and employs a variety of tools to preserve critical habitats and open space in South Sound. Since 1999 the land trust's work has focused primarily on protecting marine shorelines, estuaries and tributary streams.
- ❖ Betsy Peabody of the Puget Sound Restoration Fund explained how their approach also relies heavily on conventional and non-traditional partnerships with citizens, businesses and other organizations to carry out on-the-ground restoration projects, including Olympia oyster restoration and the Henderson Inlet community shellfish farm, that help connect people with Puget Sound and give larger segments of the community a stake in the health of these waters and resources.
- ❖ David Troutt described the mission of the Nisqually River Council and its use of watershed-based planning and management to address a suite of issues and needs. A primary focus of the group is long-term sustainability that connects watershed health with economic prosperity and community well-being, emphasizing education to build partnerships and change behaviors.

- ❖ Mark Kitabayashi noted that the greater Olympia area is one of the hottest housing markets and most desirable places to live in the country. The development/real estate industry needs certainty and predictability. He explained that realtors are part of the community, have a vested interest in preserving healthy communities, and have a significant power and opportunity to reach into the community.

## PERFORMANCE

Peter Donaldson performed an excerpt from Salmonpeople entitled “Everybody Knows How the Real World Works” to illustrate how humans hold different views of the same issues. The performance and brief presentation that followed explained how we need to engage not only our community leaders but our young leaders of tomorrow; how we need to share our experiences and perspectives and work together to solve problems; and how we need to change our behaviors and practices to use our resources more wisely with an eye to long-term sustainability.

## BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS

~ moderated by Naki Stevens, *People for Puget Sound, Puget Sound Council*

The participants divided into five groups for facilitated discussions to address two main questions:

- 1) What most caught your attention in the morning presentations and discussions?
- 2) What examples do you think present the best opportunities to build on to achieve greater success and which issues need the most urgent attention?

A complete list of comments captured by the recorders for each group discussion is available online with other material from the forum. The following are some of the prevailing themes that emerged from the breakout group discussions:

- ❖ Population growth and development present significant challenges. “Growth is really straining the balance of things.” We need to figure out how to “tread more lightly.”
- ❖ South Sound is becoming more of a bedroom community to Pierce/King counties, which is changing the complexion of the community and people’s connection to the place. “The story of a place is what people connect to, and fewer people know the story of this place.” How do we reach residents who are unengaged or who say “what’s in it for me?”
- ❖ Watersheds are a good operational unit for planning, management, and place-based problem solving. We need to expand and capitalize on opportunities to reach people where they live—address issues on a personal or neighborhood scale. Realtors, homeowners associations, civic organizations and numerous other groups present great, untapped avenues for reaching people.
- ❖ There’s need for a shared vision “that endures through time.” People need to better understand the steps and tools for getting things done. We need concrete, measurable targets to direct our efforts and to gauge progress.
- ❖ Efforts need to work toward comprehensive, ecosystem-based protection and recovery (e.g., healthy watersheds). We need to act on available information; break the work down into manageable, doable tasks and projects; and celebrate and rally around success—otherwise the issues and work can be overwhelming.
- ❖ With everything, keep it simple, make it easy. Help people understand why certain practices are important. “Complacency and ignorance are the challenge.” Define problems and

solutions in terms that people understand, and explain how collective problems link with personal actions. Misperceptions and fear of the unknown are barriers to action and change. Need large-scale, long-term public education and marketing campaign to change behaviors.

- ❖ Don't demonize—create and capitalize on win-win opportunities. We're dealing with issues where segments of the community are polarized, which stands in the way of great opportunities for collaboration.
- ❖ Need to understand and use financial incentives to promote and reward desired behaviors, and use impact fees and other fees to mitigate damages and to support infrastructure improvements.
- ❖ Innovate and apply a suite of approaches, such as wastewater reclamation, conservation easements, shellfish biofiltration, and low impact development. Apply approaches to both new development and existing development (i.e., retrofitting), and maintain a long-term view of protection and restoration.
- ❖ We need strong leadership, effective regulation and massive education, and we need to understand that the work is unending. "Do we have the will and the skill to protect Puget Sound?"

## READING

Jim Lynch shared reflections of his time living in South Sound and his experiences writing and promoting the book *The Highest Tide*. The book captures the unique and enchanting character of South Sound, which is central to the story's great appeal and the novel's success and has also drawn attention to the important task of protecting and restoring the rich, natural environment of South Puget Sound.

## CLOSING

Doug Mah outlined a number of issues that were addressed during the forum, revisited the objectives of the day's discussions and touched on next steps. He pointed out that the forum was not designed to inform or support any one planning process or program, but instead was designed to inform a number of processes, plans and programs in the South Sound region. Work on the issues is expected to continue on a number of fronts by a variety of organizations and interests. The South Sound indicators report provided a backdrop for the day's discussions and will continue to serve as both a guide and benchmark for future efforts.